



## Are You Asking The Right Questions?

Can you relate to this scene? You're sitting at your desk thinking about your latest hiring mistake. The interview went great, the person presented himself well, had enthusiastic responses to every question, the references were good, and everyone liked him a lot. Six months into the job, though, and it's clear he can't do the things he said he could. What went wrong?

Maybe he lied to you when he said he had experience handling difficult customers. After all, you hear all the time that people lie on their resumes. While this is a possibility, maybe he never actually said he had experience handling difficult customers. Maybe you assumed it.

Statistically, the typical interview is one of the least effective ways to predict whether someone will be successful on a job. The reason for this is that a typical interview is much more like a casual conversation than a probing analysis of a person's ability to perform, making the odds of coming to the right conclusion very low. But there is an easy way to shift the odds in your favor, and it's all in the

way you ask questions.

What's wrong with the following question: "Tell me how you would handle a difficult customer?"

First, this is a hypothetical situation that will typically elicit a hypothetical response. All you'll hear is what the candidate thinks he might do if the situation occurred or, worse yet, what the candidate thinks you want to hear. And second, since the situation is hypothetical, there is no way to ask follow-up questions.

Try it this way: "Tell me about a time when you had a difficult customer come into the store." This is called a "behavior-based" interview question. Here, you force the candidate to draw from experience to answer the question. Depending upon the response, you'll quickly see whether he ever really had to deal with difficult customers.

You also have a basis to ask the all important follow-up questions: "How did the customer

react to your response? "How did you know to respond the way you did?" "What did your supervisor have to say about how you handled the person?" "What did you learn from the situation?" and, "What would you have done differently?" The follow-up questions serve to verify the depth of the person's experience.

Why is this important?

Because the best predictor of future behavior (at your office) is past behavior (at someone else's office). Thinking back on your interview, how did you ask your questions? Did your candidate tell you what he would do, or what he actually did do?

Try this technique the next time you are interviewing. You'll find that the depth of responses improves dramatically, and that you have much more information to make an informed hiring decision. If you are not comfortable developing questions like this, ask an HR professional to draft behavior-based questions for you. &

### CONTACT INFO

For more information about behavior-based interviewing techniques, please contact Hugh Fisher, Director of Human Resources Consulting, at (216) 774-1121 or e-mail [hfisher@cohencpa.com](mailto:hfisher@cohencpa.com).